

# Monument Valley

Desert offers haunting vistas,  
the eerie sound of silence

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The towering red and orange sandstone buttes are astounding. The Anasazi petroglyphs are haunting. And the views of Navajo culture and lifestyle are a gift. But what may be the greatest wonder of a visit to Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park is the silence.

No road noise, no cabs honking, no leaf blowers or lawnmowers, just overwhelming quiet. The sound of the breeze blowing the sandy soil or the pounding of one's own heart is crisp and clear and clean.

Located in northeastern Arizona and southeastern Utah, Monument Valley's sandstone and shale mesas and buttes, spires and canyons and sand dunes cover 29,816 strikingly beautiful acres of the Navajo Indian Reservation.

The towering monoliths

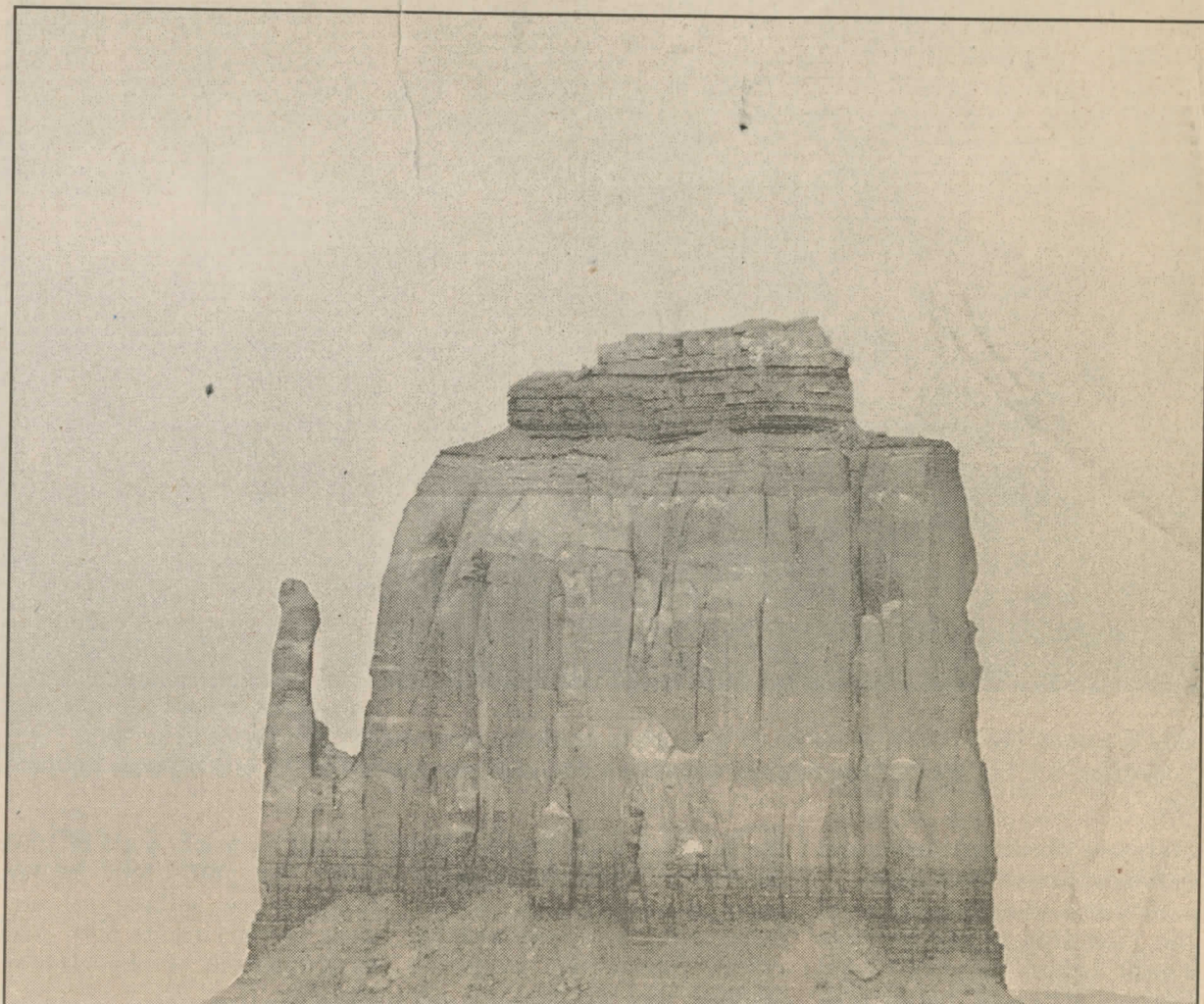
## If you go

### GETTING THERE:

Monument Valley, which straddles the northeastern Arizona and southeastern Utah borders, is a long trip from anywhere, but well worth the drive. With the towering monoliths rising from the desert, the trip's final miles along scenic Highway 163 offer a beautiful prelude to the spectacular scenery yet to come.

Monument Valley lies 170 miles northeast of Flagstaff, Ariz. America West Airlines flies into the Flagstaff Pulliam Airport, and about a dozen car rental agencies have desks at the terminal. Phoenix is just over 300 miles south and its airport is a hub for America West Airlines.

The park is 160 miles east





were brought into the national spotlight in 1938 when John Ford and John Wayne filmed "Stagecoach" in the valley. Ever since, visitors from across the globe have traveled to see its natural wonders and to catch a glimpse of Navajo life.

John Wayne returned for a number of films, and his presence is felt today in framed photographs and movie posters in local lodging, restaurants, and in the park's Visitors Center itself.

A 17-mile dirt road runs a loop through Monument Valley. For a small fee, a carload can spend a pleasant two hours driving the rugged road through the towering giants. There are no hiking trails in the park, and rock climbing is prohibited, but there are many places to pull over and stop and enjoy the spectacular views and the silence.

A dog guiding a herd of sheep can be seen in the canyon below the Totem Pole monument, and often a Navajo on horseback greets visitors at John Ford's Point. He'll even pose for photographs for a small charge.

**Prehistoric past**

Anasazi Indians lived in Monument Valley before 1300. They disappeared sometime in the 14th century, leaving only their petroglyphs and pictographs on the walls of the rocks as a clue to their existence.

The Navajo came to the area in the mid-1800's, possibly fleeing Kit Carson as he flushed dusty travelers. It is open daily as a small museum, gift shop, snack bar, and showers for the Visitors Center is a good place to start a tour of the park.

The Navajo Reservation now encompasses 16 million acres, and Monument Valley was set aside in 1958 as the first Navajo Tribal Park.

The Indians from Canyon de Chelly 120 miles to the south. Dozens of Navajo families live within the park itself and their hogans can be seen from the road on any of the tours.

The Navajo Reservation now encompasses 16 million acres, and Monument Valley was set aside in 1958 as the first Navajo Tribal Park.

The Visitors Center is a good place to start a tour of the park. It offers stunning views as well as a small museum, gift shop, snack bar, and showers for dusty travelers. It is open daily

- ADMISSION:** The self-guided driving trip through Monument Valley costs \$2.50 for adults, \$1 for seniors, and is free for children under 7. It takes about two hours to drive the unpaved loop.
- RULES:** Vehicles over 27 feet long are prohibited. Pets must be on a leash. Alcohol is strictly prohibited on the Navajo Indian Reservation.
- INFORMATION:** Call the Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park at (435) 727-3353 or (435) 727-1480, or the Navajo Parks and Recreation Department at (520) 871-6647.
- There are no good sites on the World Wide Web for this adventure.

**The Mitten:** The moon rises over a butte known at The Mitten at Monument Valley Navajo Tribal Park in northeastern Arizona. The striking sandstone mesas, buttes and spires of the park can be enjoyed by car, horse or jeep tour.

from 8am-4:30pm, but a trip to the viewing deck which wraps around the center for the sunrise and the sunset is a must. The sun at both times of day leaves the monoliths and the land awash with color.

Outside the Visitor's Center sit crudely built booths housing several Navajo-run tours from Keyah Hozhoni Tours to Fred's Adventure Tours. Jeep and horseback tours lasting an hour to overnight are available and cost anywhere from \$20 to more than \$100. The overnight



AMY SANCETTA/The Associated Press

**Finding the sites**

The guided tours are the only way to view the Anasazi petroglyphs, which are mostly found in adjacent Mystery Valley. Invitations to view Navajo women weaving rugs on traditional looms within a family's hogan are also available only with a guide.

Navajos set up booths at



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various points along the self-guided tour selling beautiful and reasonably priced hand-crafted jewelry. The handiwork is exquisite and the prices are a bargain compared to jewelry found in local retail stores. Pictures of the locals are discouraged, but may be attained for a small fee. It's important to remember the park still is home to many of the Navajo.

In the small and dusty town of Kayenta, 24 miles south, there are two hotels, the Holiday Inn and the Wetherhill Inn, a Best Western Hotel. But there's hardly a better place to stay than Gouldings Trading Post and Lodge, adjacent to the entrance to Monument Valley.

In operation since the 1920s, its 64 rooms are nestled into the side of a towering butte and all have balconies looking out over the valley. John Wayne even had his own cabin here.

Gouldings offers a small museum and gift shop, an indoor pool, a celebratory film of Monument Valley, a car wash for your inevitably dusty vehicle, and, at the front desk, a selection of Hollywood movies filmed at the park.

Tiered, with windows overlooking the park, the charming Stage Coach Restaurant offers

a menu ranging from steak and seafood to pasta and burgers. It also features the curious "peanut butter cobbettes" which are described as "a unique flavor for the customer with the exploratory palate."

For those not as exploratory, try the traditional and delicious Navajo taco.

Alcohol is prohibited anywhere on the Navajo Reservation.

Kayenta offers several restaurants, including the Golden Sands Café, which is fashioned after an Old West saloon, and the locally popular Amigos, which serves Navajo, Mexican, and American fare.

Monument Valley is also a welcoming destination for campers. Adjoining the Visitors Center is a 100-site campground, and Gouldings has its own campground just west of the lodge.

Easy to miss, but worth the drive, is the Oljeto Trading Post. Part museum, part trading post, and a throw-back to the 1920's, the site is only 11 miles northwest of Gouldings and is a popular place to buy Navajo handicrafts.

Monument Valley is open year-round, but is most popular from April through October.

The Navajo close the park and enjoy the silence on their own on Christmas Day and for a half-day at Thanksgiving.